

## **Changes in Minority Access to VA Mental Health Care**

VISN 1 MIRECC researchers have found that Hispanic veterans' access to post-hospital mental health care declined during later 1990's when sweeping changes were made in VA healthcare delivery. This study compared quality of care in over 180,000 White, Black and Hispanic veterans who had a mental health hospitalization between 1995-2001. This time period corresponds with the VA reorganization into VISN's and with a dramatic reduction in mental health inpatient beds coupled with a substantial increase in mental health outpatient service visits. Quality indicators included post-discharge re-hospitalization rates and on provision of post-discharge outpatient care. Prior to the reorganization, in 1995, quality of care indicators for both Black and Hispanic veterans were lower than for White veterans. Throughout the period of change, this trend continued but care for Black veterans tended to improve while continuity of care deteriorated for Hispanic veterans. This move toward greater inequity of mental health care for Hispanic veterans may be part of a general pattern for Hispanic individuals to make less use of outpatient mental health treatment while there is less disparity in their use of inpatient care. Hence, a re-organization that replaces reduced inpatient access with increased outpatient care appears to have had a negative impact on access to care by Hispanic veterans. Many previous studies have shown that the VA's reorganization of mental health services has not adversely affected treatment of the general population of veterans with mental illness. However, this report is the first to examine potential differences in the impact of these changes for White veterans, who represented 64% of the sample compared with Black and Hispanic veterans who represented 32% and 4% of the total. This study suggests the need for greater efforts to improve mental health treatment access by Hispanic and Black veterans. VISN 1 MIRECC researchers Greg Greenberg and Robert Rosenheck conducted this research.